

**City of Takoma Park Residents Committee on
Tax and Service Duplication Issues (TASDI)
Meeting for December 1, 2004
7:00 – 9:00 p.m. at Columbia Union College**

AGENDA

Co-chairs Bruce Moyer and Dan Robinson called the meeting to order a few minutes after 7. Suzanne Ludlow was present to represent the City; Barbara Matthews was attending to personal business. All of the members of the Committee were present except for John Conger, Lawrence Mishel and Christopher Victoria. There were no guests present.

Bruce said he felt the committee was beginning to develop a good understanding of the services provided by the city, and that the committee would wait until January to address issues related to the citizen survey. Seth Grimes said the committee should help design the survey, but should keep in mind that the survey will not be done in time to be part of the committee's report that is due in about five months.

Dan suggested all committee members review the legislative schedule included in the night's handouts as an excellent primer on how legislation moves at the city, county and state level.

Meeting Goals

The primary tasks on the evening's agenda were to receive a detailed report on city services, including a brief overview of the county's support, if any, for particular projects, and also to convene committee subgroups to enable members to organize their specific activities.

Report on City Services

Suzanne Ludlow gave the committee packets containing: an extensive list of city services along with notations whether the county performs similar services and whether it provides a rebate to the city in that category; a compendium of mostly minor service cutbacks or adjustments and their estimated impact on the budget; a list of suggested revenue "enhancements;" a memo to the City Council from Barbara Matthews on Community Center funding dated October 15; and other items.

Suzanne discussed the committee's new web site that is up and running and will become a repository for all of the committee's work, making it readily available to the public. She regretted that more of the committee's meetings cannot be held in council chambers, but construction has created a space shortage. The next three meetings, one on December 8, and two more in January, will be at Columbia Union College.

Committee members approved the minutes from the previous meeting, and agreed that the committee's primary mission is information-gathering. All agreed that committee members should continue to communicate among themselves on-line, but should reserve decision-making for full plenary sessions.

Suzanne explained the cost duplication charts prepared for the committee and added that some of the information contained amounted to "educated guesses" because the actual impact of certain actions is difficult to estimate. Also, she pointed out that not all of the services outlined in the report fit snugly into one category. For example, the elimination of certain city services or ceding certain services back to the county would have a commensurate impact on administrative costs that are listed in a separate category. Also, some alternatives for cost cutting would have ancillary impacts. For example, if the sanitation department were eliminated, it would mean also that no city staff would be available for snow plowing.

Suzanne devoted a good part of her presentation to the police department which comprises the largest single chunk of city spending. The county rebates part of the cost for city police services because in the absence of such services, the county would have to provide police for Takoma Park. Suzanne said the rebate runs two years behind. Thus, the county rebate for fiscal 2005 will be based upon the actual expenses that the County claims would have been incurred had it been responsible for providing police services in fiscal 2003.

The county rebate for city police is predicated not on what the city does, but on what the county would do, or says it would do, if it was responsible for city police protection. Takoma Park has always had its own police dating back to before the county had a police force. The county has compensated the city for this in some form since the 1940's though it wasn't called a rebate back then.

The biggest cost item in the police budget is for patrol officers. The county compensates Takoma Park for 31 of 32 patrol and sergeant positions. The county has stated that it believes the formula should be changed in a way that would result in compensation for only 21 patrol and sergeant slots in Takoma Park. Takoma Park employs its own senior officers, who also may respond to calls, and its own Criminal Investigation Division, bringing the total complement to 41 sworn officers, of which 37 are currently filled. The county says if it were responsible for police services in Takoma Park it would not need to employ extra supervisors or administrative staff, it would provide only two CID people instead of the seven provided by Takoma Park, and it would not need to hire additional dispatch staff. Takoma Park maintains a dispatch operation 24/7.

Suzanne made it clear that Takoma Park provides both more people and more services than is customary for the county. The county does not respond to every call. If someone breaks your car window in the county, a report will be taken by

telephone. False alarms also get short shrift from the county. After three false alarms, you have to pay a fee.

The Takoma Park City Police incur some \$656,000 in administrative costs for which the county provides no rebate. The county has notified the city it intends to REDUCE the rebate in the next cycle. The city is currently in negotiations about this. The density of the lower county, and its proximity to D.C. and Prince George's County, argues for more aggressive policing.

Suzanne said the city also provides a higher level of leaf collection than the county does. The county actually doesn't provide leaf collection everywhere in the county, much of which is rural. The city also is perceived to be more aggressive about removing snow.

City residents must help the county pay for its capital investments, but the county does not help the city pay for its capital investments, such as bridges and public buildings. The county has said it would not accept city streets as county roads, meaning local residents would inherit responsibility for them, nor does the county provide extensive tree services.

The county does not invest much time and resources in the relatively small public parks in the Takoma Park area, preferring to spend on the most spacious public spaces upcounty. The county does pay to operate the Takoma Park Recreation Center on New Hampshire Avenue.

Takoma Park has the only municipal public library in the state of Maryland. (The Pratt library in Baltimore is considered to be a county facility. Suzanne says officials in Annapolis have a morbid aversion to municipal libraries, presumably because they might threaten the county system that prevails in the state.) Takoma Park spends \$668,000 on its library and ancillary services, and the county "pays" us \$89,700 to help compensate, as part of an agreement made at the time of the Takoma Park unification into Montgomery County.

The county says if the city closed its library, the county would not replace it, but rather would expect residents to use the Long Branch Library. Suzanne says our library has a special section on horticulture and Takoma Park history.

Following, Suzanne's presentation, and a few questions, the committee subdivided into working groups: Service Analysis, Tax/Income Stream Analysis, and Education and Communication. The subgroups will report to the full committee at the next meeting on December 8 at Columbia College.

Items on Easel Sheets from Dec. 1 TASDI Meeting

What leverage do we actually have with county

Average vs. Marginal Cost in rebate determination

Accounting for capital proj. Operationalise costs?

Written documentation of county intend to not provide comparable recreation service

How officers are scheduled Staff available per shift

Evaluation of how county police services have changed and compare to rebates

Constraints on growth through “adequate facilities” rules like Prince George’s

Police/County MOU

Study on how much rent control depresses property values & then taxes?

What portion of tax revenues are from rental properties?

How do cable costs and cable income compare?

What is Code Enforcement \$290,000 representative of? (Try to keep fees/cost comparable)

Can we get other “payments” like the Library payment where tax rebate/refund lacking

How secure is library payment?

Account for how services are used–Library vs After school program